DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 265 HE 031 321

AUTHOR	Muraskin, Lana D.
TITLE	A Structured Freshman Year for At-Risk Students.
INSTITUTION	National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations, Washington, DC.; National TRIO Clearinghouse, Washington, DC.; Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Opportunity, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	25p.; The National TRIO Clearinghouse also serves as an "Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Opportunity."
AVAILABLE FROM	National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations, 1025 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Suite 900, Washington DC 20005; phone: 202-347-7430.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Advising; *Academic Persistence; College Attendance; *College Curriculum; *College Freshmen; College Students; Dropout Research; *Enrollment Management; *High Risk Students; Higher Education; School Holding Power; Student Attrition; Student School Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	Lewis Clark State College ID; Marquette University WI; University of Maryland; University of New Orleans LA; University of South Carolina

ABSTRACT

This monograph focuses on the first year of college and the need for structured first-year programs that help at-risk students make a successful transition to college. It provides a detailed discussion of the elements of a structured first-year program, including: (1) participation in the admissions process for at-risk students; (2) pre-freshman-year academic and social preparation; (3) intrusive advisement throughout the freshman year; (4) provision of academic services that buttress courses in which students are enrolled; (5) group services with extended service hours to build cohesion among participants; and (6) conscientious efforts to convey a message of success to students. Additionally, examples of structured first-year programs at five institutions of higher education the University of New Orleans; Marquette University (Wisconsin); Lewis-Clark State College (Idaho); University of Maryland at College Park, and University of South Carolina are profiled. (Contains 12 references.) (CH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 420 265

A Structured Freshman Year for At-Risk Students

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

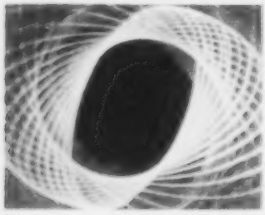
By: Lana D. Muraskin
Senior Scholar
The Center for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education

Published as a service of the National TRIO Clearinghouse

HE031321

The National TRIO Clearinghouse, an adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Opportunity, collects and disseminates information, applied program materials, resources and research related to TRIO Programs and TRIO students. The Clearinghouse focuses on issues of educational opportunity and access to higher education for low income, first generation participants and students with disabilities. TRIO Clearinghouse services include reference and referrals; a web site at URL: "http://www.trioprograms.org"; publications and bibliographies; presentations; and symposia. The Clearinghouse is housed at the Center for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, a program of the National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations. The National TRIO Clearinghouse is funded by a grant from the United States Department of Education.

A Structured Freshman Year for At-Risk Students



By: Lana D. Muraskin
Senior Scholar
The Center for the
Study of Opportunity
in Higher Education

FORWARD

Interest in student retention has not waned. If anything it has increased over the years as more and more states have moved to require colleges and universities to report and in some cases, be accountable for improvements in student retention. Nowhere is this movement more strongly felt than among those institutions that are least prepared to meet the many academic and social demands college life imposes. And nowhere is the need for effective action more urgent. "At-risk" students are our future. Their success is our success.

But as many institutions have discovered, improving student retention is no easy matter, especially among "at risk" students. Though real gains are possible, they take time and the investment of considerable faculty and staff energies. This is the case because enduring gains in student retention require institutions to rethink and in some case, substantially change, the way they go about the important task of educating their students. We must not forget that student education is the source of student retention, enhance student learning and the vehicle through which improved retention arises.

But while we have focused on student learning generally, only recently have we given serious attention to education and retention on our campuses. Three new monographs published by the National TRIO Clearinghouse represent a needed step in that direction. These monographs focus on three important areas of institutional action namely, first-year programs, tutoring and campus cultural activities.

The monograph by Lana Muraskin, entitled A Structured Freshman Year for At-Risk Students focuses on the critical first year of college and the need for structured first-year programs which help students make a successful transition to college. It provides a detailed description of the elements of a structured first-year program for "at-risk" students as well as real world examples of programs in four different institutions of higher education. In the monograph entitled Providing Effective Tutorial Services, Joyce Weinsheimer speaks to the character of effective tutoring and its place in an integrated approach to student assistance. Drawing upon examples from several institutions, she details the attributes of effective tutorial services. In so doing, she argues that tutorial services need to work with other areas of the institution to build a campus climate that promotes student success. Patrick Velasquez speaks more directly to issues of campus climate, specifically the role of cultural activities in promoting the inclusion of underrepresented groups on campus. In his monograph Cultural Activities and Campus Involvement, Velasquez draws upon theories of student involvement and persistence and case studies of strategies employed in four divergent higher educational settings to demonstrate how cultural activities can involve and serve to validate under-represented groups on campus. Such involvements, he argues, are part and parcel of student success on campus.

Though there are other issues involved in promoting the success of "at-risk" students in higher education, such as those pertaining to teaching and advising, these monographs will help to advance our thinking about some of the elements of effective programs.

Vincent Tinto
Professor of Education and Sociology
School of Education
Syracuse University

1. The Need for A Structured Freshman Year Experience

Students are at greatest risk of not completing college during their first year. Over half the nation's college freshmen will not progress from freshman to sophomore status. In the 1992-93 school year, for example, 48 percent of the nation's undergraduates were freshmen, but only 22 percent were sophomores (Horn & Premo, 1997). At four year colleges alone, 37 percent of those who fail to complete degrees leave before their second year. Clearly, the freshman year is a critical juncture for all students, but it is a particular concern for first-generation and low income students whose rates of college completion lag well behind those of more advantaged students.

For many years, researchers have been trying to explain the conditions that predispose some students to leave during freshman year, while others maintain their studies. One of their initial conclusions was that academic performance, while important, did not sufficiently explain college leaving. Students who left were not as likely as their peers to be performing adequately academically, but many students with adequate academic performance were also leaving. Roughly a third left college because they were suspended, expelled, or placed on academic probation, but two-thirds of leavers were academically adequate (although the leaving rate for students with poor academic performance has increased in recent decades) (Tinto, 1997). These findings have led researchers to seek other reasons that also help to explain why students leave.

The best-known and most studied theory of the non-academic components of college leaving is Tinto's theory of college attrition (1993). Tinto focuses a powerful lens on the first year of college, arguing that it is a unique time for students. They are called upon to break with childhood, often to live away from home for the first time and to adapt to a new and unfamiliar environment. Some will make the transition relatively easily while others will experience great difficulty and will not adjust. Those who fail to adjust successfully will be far more likely to leave. Why do some adjust well and not others? Successful adjustment, Tinto argues, is in part a function of whether students feel they belong at the college--socially and academically--and their ability to establish connections between themselves and others at the school. Academic adjustment is powerfully influenced by academic performance but it is also influenced by interactions with faculty and staff, as well as use of support services.

Whatever the reasons for staying or leaving, it is clear that freshman year is the most important time to intervene in students' lives if we want to increase college retention. Some narrow the point of intervention and type of intervention even further. Tinto, for example, has recently argued that it is the first few weeks of freshman year that may well determine the likelihood that students will successfully adjust to college life. Not only that, it is their initial academic experience that is most critical to both academic and social adjustment: "...retention programs should include initiatives

that change the everyday academic experience of students, especially during the critical first year....the roots of successful student retention lie in better education during the first year" (Tinto, et al., 1993). In other words, learning itself must be constructed in a manner that promotes retention. Tinto bases these conclusions on the outcomes of recent demonstrations he has conducted at several institutions. These conclusions have led him to study a new approach to freshman-year services he calls learning communities, a way of organizing course instruction and study around intellectual themes and student group cohesion. In initial trials, the learning community approach has shown promise in retaining in college students from widely varying economic and social backgrounds.

The importance of positive academic experiences in solidifying institutional adjustment and, hence, freshman retention is reinforced through other empirical studies as well. There have been numerous evaluations of intensive freshman-year interventions providing various combinations of advising, tutoring, study groups, supplemental instruction, study skill courses or workshops, and summer bridge programs that offer an academic head start. Many of these programs are targeted on economically disadvantaged students, minority students, or other students considered at risk. They usually start at or before the beginning of the freshman year and play an important role in the students' initial educational experience. In general, the results of these evaluations have been encouraging--early and directive intervention seems to be associated with increased retention from freshman to sophomore years and beyond (see Abrams and Jernigan, 1984; Burris, 1990; Doyle, 1989; Read, 1982-1985, McCaig, 1993).

Findings of the recent National Study of Student Support Services provide further indications of both the importance of institutional adjustment and the role of freshman intervention (Chaney, et al, 1997). Unlike Tinto's work, which applies to students as a whole, the National Study has focused on a population of disadvantaged students (first generation and low income students). The findings reinforce Tinto's theory in several respects. First, the study underscores the importance of formal institutional attachments in retention. Students who were not enrolled in the third year after college entrance were more likely to have started on a part-time basis. They had less confidence in their academic abilities at entrance and were more likely to have experienced academic difficulties in their first year. Nonetheless, they were less likely to seek assistance from faculty or advisors, participate in study groups, or use academic support services. They were also less likely to have attended a summer "bridge" program before freshman year.

In addition, an in-depth examination of projects included in the National Study that demonstrated site-level statistically significant effects for freshman participants underscores the importance of freshman year in retention (Muraskin, 1997). All of these projects put the bulk of their service effort for all participants into the freshman year and rarely retain students as SSS participants beyond sophomore year. These projects stress initial academic performance and do more than most to pro-

mote it. And almost all of these projects offer the form of service we will describe in this monograph--a project-designed or "structured" freshman-year experience. The next section of the paper will outline the key components of this approach, as drawn from SSS projects that are using it successfully.

II. The Elements of a Structured Freshman Year Project

In a structured freshman year project, project staff design the initial educational experience of project participants. Although the details vary across the sites we have studied, a central feature of these projects is that the staff plays an active role in selecting the students' initial academic program and making sure that students will be sufficiently academically prepared to succeed in that program. Projects may also help in other important ways--deciding who will be admitted, operating pre-freshman academic enrichment programs (summer "bridge"), providing personal counseling, and helping students with non-academic needs that affect academic performance (such as obtaining day care or jobs), but the key involvement is in fostering academic success. Unlike some of the other retention services described in this monograph series, structured freshman year is a way of organizing and delivering services rather than a specific service.

Although it may be a good idea for all students, the structured freshman year approach is particularly helpful for students considered at risk in a particular college setting. Thus, structured freshman year programs are found in SSS as well as educational opportunity programs for economically disadvantaged, conditionally admitted, or other at-risk students. A given project may enroll students on an institution-wide basis or it may enroll only students in particular colleges or with particular interests or majors. Projects are supported from many sources--SSS grants as well as state grants, institutional funds, foundation funds, and private sources (such as professional associations). In this document, we will focus on describing programs that operate through SSS primarily.

The most common features of SSS-sponsored structured freshman year programs with demonstrated effectiveness include the following:

- Project participation in the college admissions process for at-risk students
- Pre-freshman-year academic and social preparation
- A major project role in participants' initial course selection
- An intrusive advising process throughout the freshman year
- Provision of academic services that buttress the courses in which the participants are enrolled

- Group services that extend service hours and build cohesion among participants

- A powerful message of success through conscientious effort

Not every project we have studied has every one of these components, but most of the projects have most of the components. Further, structured freshman year programs are often provided to a portion of SSS participants in a given project, not everyone in the project. This section of this monograph describes each of the components in greater detail, based on the projects studied as part of the National Study of SSS.

Project participation in college admissions for at-risk students

Many structured-freshman-year projects play a role in selecting their participants and even when they do not play a direct role, the project is often tied to the admissions process. In some projects, staff members participate in committees that decide who will be admitted conditionally (often called special admissions). It is institutional policy that those students will participate in the project as a condition of admission. Other projects participate in a more general admissions process in order to identify students who could benefit from assistance through the project although the students are not under a mandate to participate in the project. Or, the project may not participate directly in selecting admittees but admissions officials direct certain students (conditional admits or others) to the project as a condition of admission. The important point is that there is a direct organizational and/or temporal connection between admission to the institution and participation in the structured-freshman-year program.

The link between admissions and the project is important for several reasons. First, it means that participants encounter the project at or before college entrance, providing the opportunity for very early contact (and course selection). Second, when project staff members participate directly in admissions decisions they are able to screen and select for admission and/or project participation persons who are likely to benefit from services. If project participation and conditional admission are linked, students must follow project advice in order to stay in school. Projects that have the authority to affect a student's college tenure also have a great responsibility. They must give sound advice and offer services that will improve the students' retention rates. Even when there is no formal policy that links admissions and project participation, however, projects with close ties to the admissions process often gain the perception of linkage, giving the project greater authority in the eyes of students. In truth, failing to participate actively in a project rarely, if ever, results in dismissal if the student is performing adequately in courses. But having the symbolic status to affect college tenure is important--the students see the project and the advice of its

staff as a central part of their educational experience and a crucial link between themselves and the institution.

Pre-freshman year academic and social preparation

Pre-freshman (or summer bridge) programs are a powerful tool for creating a structured freshman year. For specially admitted students, college admission is sometimes tied to participation in a set of academic, counseling, social, and other activities in the summer prior to freshman year. Other students may also participate in these programs when space and resources are available. Typically, colleges operate 4, 6, or 8 week summer bridge programs designed to bring students' basic skills up to par with those of other entrants through developmental offerings, give participants a taste of freshman courses (enrolling them in a carefully selected set of offerings) and introduce the students to the campus and its services. In addition, the summer programs, which are often (but not always) residential, build cohesion among participants and between participants and staff. As a result, students are less likely to enter fall semester feeling isolated. There is solid evidence from evaluation research that summer bridge projects play an important role in increasing retention among at-risk students (Guthrie, 1992; Walters and Marcus, 1985).

Given what we known about the reasons students leave college, the advantages of summer programs prior to freshman year are obvious. The earlier students can meet other students and feel comfortable at the campus the greater the likelihood of making a successful adjustment in the fall. Improving academic skills gives students a better chance of performing well and improves their self confidence as well. Getting a few credits under their belts enables students to experience success. At the same time, summer programs offer much more time for advising about majors and possible careers, as well as for directing students to fall courses and faculty where they are likely to perform well.

Although it is not typical, some SSS structured-freshman-year projects begin as summer bridge. That more projects do not start this way is often an issue of money--summer bridge is a costly expenditure for SSS projects that typically spend about $850 per participant per year. One way that SSS projects have operated residential bridge programs is through institutional arrangements in which all the participants' basic costs (tuition for regular courses, room, board, and miscellaneous expenses) are supported through a package of grant aid. SSS provides (and pays for) some combination of administration, developmental course instruction, academic support (peer tutoring, supplemental instruction or study group leaders) and advising. Sometimes SSS staff members provide advising or other services in a bridge program that is operated by another entity and the SSS structured-freshman-year program becomes the extension of summer bridge during freshman year.

Choosing participants' initial courses

Perhaps the most important component of a structured freshman year program is that its staff plays a pivotal role in students' course selections. If Tinto and others are correct, students' initial academic experiences make all the difference in whether they remain or leave, particularly those students whose commitment is likely to be shaky. Experiencing success in freshman courses is critical. Tinto stresses the importance of intellectual themes that link the initial courses in which students enroll. Rather than viewing their courses as a set of unrelated and disjointed topics, students can see connections in what they are learning, enhancing their academic adjustment. Tinto also stresses shared learning as a means to both academic and social adjustment. Enrolling in several courses together enables a group of students to get to know one another and develop common interests.

The SSS projects have somewhat different but related objectives in helping students select their initial courses. First, they want to enroll students in courses where they believe students will be successful. Staff members identify appropriate courses based, in part, on their knowledge of the professors in those courses and their assessment of those professors' willingness to help students at risk. They also know the past performance of SSS participants in those courses. In addition, they schedule students into courses that meet requirements and into courses where SSS (or, sometimes, another support service provider) is providing instruction or academic support. These classes include SSS-sponsored developmental offerings as well as popular freshman courses where SSS (or another providers) offers supplemental instruction, study groups, or tutoring.

There are some ways in which links across courses are established. The SSS developmental offerings may be aimed at affecting performance elsewhere; for example, a developmental English courses may offer assistance with assignments for a social science course in which most of the students are simultaneously enrolled. The provision of supplemental instruction or study groups attached to large, required courses enables participants to gain study skills in the context of academic coursework and to get to know their fellow SSS participants as well (see monograph on supplemental instruction for more detail on these offerings).

Building group cohesion through course scheduling ("block rostering") is a conscious choice for many structured-freshman-year projects. Staff members want participants to see the same faces in several courses and academic support sessions (SI, study groups) so that students get to know one another. Students indicate that this approach helps to break down isolation and enables them to make friends in an often impersonal setting. SI and study groups help students see that they are not alone in needing help; many other students are "in the same boat." Rather than creating a stigma for SSS participants, getting to know each other in "block rostered" courses or SI helps students feel connected and it also helps them arrange informal study and social gatherings.

Intrusive advising

Almost every support service provider claims to provide intrusive advising. The terms have become so devalued that it is important to take a moment to understand what intrusive advising means in the context of a structured freshman year. First of all, it means the directive course selection process already described, a process that is usually repeated for the second semester as well. In addition, it often means that the SSS staff, whether or not they are the advisors of record, intervenes to approve or disapprove course drops and other mid-course actions. The project may also intervene to ward off academic probation or suspension (or, sometimes, recommend them). Intrusive advising definitely includes mid-term assessments in which staff members report to the students on their status in each course. It may also mean, however, that a student who fails to follow SSS staff advice to seek help for a failing midterm grade can be terminated from the project. Because many structured freshman year projects are serving conditionally-admitted students, being dropped from SSS (e.g., for failing to show up for classes or academic support services) can mean loss of financial assistance or suspension from school. In other words, these projects keep a very close watch on participants and give advice that it sometimes obligatory for students.

It is important to balance this picture, however, and note that these projects also intervene to help students whose behavior shows they are trying to succeed. They intervene with faculty when they believe students have special needs or have been treated unfairly. They sometimes intervene with financial aid officials to help students who are experiencing financial difficulties. Project staff sometimes operate very small-scale loan operations with their personal funds so that a student whose car breaks down or who lacks bus fare can get to school. In short, SSS advisors have considerable power to affect students' tenure at the college (especially when the students have been admitted on condition of participating in the project), but they use it judiciously.

Provision of academic services that reinforce coursework

Like directiveness in course selection, academic support for coursework is probably a defining feature of a structured-freshman-year program for at-risk students. The same reasons that lead to directed course selection, especially the need to experience early academic success, also lead projects to augment courses with additional academic help. The forms of help vary: one-on-one or small group peer or professional tutoring, study groups, and supplemental instruction are the main forms. Because structured-freshman-year projects know, in advance, the courses in which participants will be enrolled, they are increasingly turning to group services--small group tutoring, study groups, SI--to provide academic support. Not only are group

instructional services somewhat less expensive but they are increasingly recognized to have unique benefits for learning.

When SSS operates the structured-freshman-year project it may offer all of the academic support directly it or it may refer students to other providers as well. Almost all SSS projects offer one-on-one peer tutoring although this option was less common among the structured-freshman-year projects we studied than was group academic support (group tutoring, study groups, labs, etc.). These projects tended to offer forms of academic support more directly linked to "block rostered" courses--including study groups, supplemental instruction and study labs. They also offered developmental courses that were linked to regular courses by focusing the content of the developmental course on the readings and math skills required by the regular course.

SSS also coordinated with other providers to offer academic support. For example, SSS might "block roster" participants to developmental course offerings of the institution (i.e., enroll them together in certain sections) but provide an SSS-supported lab or tutor linked to the sections. In addition, projects refer students to tutoring, study groups, or writing labs operated by the college or university to supplement the offerings in which the SSS participants have been enrolled, en masse. In this manner, the project is able to extend and leverage its limited resources to operate a more integrated freshman-year project.

Building Community Through Group Services

Not all freshman-year projects may have started out to build community as a means to improve retention, but the ways in which they have organized their service delivery (block rostering, study groups, supplemental instruction) have had that effect. Group services have an added benefit as well; they greatly extend the average contact hours of project service. The benefit of additional hours was documented in the National Study of SSS, which found that retention was directly related to contact hours--the more contact of the participant with the project (one-on-one or group) the greater his or her chance of performing well (GPA) or staying in school to the third year. Some of these projects have even moved to group services for such traditionally one-on-one services as routine academic advising (except for mid-term assessments and other confidential matters).

One of the strongest messages of the participants in the successful SSS projects we studied was that the relationships they established with fellow students had important positive effects on their retention. SSS staff members sometimes fear that grouping SSS participants together in a developmental class or an SI group, or even identifying the student in some manner as an SSS participant, will have as stigmatizing effect. What we found was just the opposite; the students value quite highly the friendships they forge through SSS participation. They see the camaraderie of the

group as one of the most important influences on their remaining in school. In addition, the students usually welcome identification with the project, especially in large institutions where new students often have to fend for themselves. SSS participants appreciate it when SSS staff speak on their behalf with faculty and staff.

Voicing a powerful message

A freshman-year program of the kind described here may seem highly didactic and demand considerable effort from participants. It is important to remember that the program comes with an important and positive message. That message is: If you (the student) take the courses we recommend and attend regularly, participate conscientiously in the supplemental academic support we offer, and attend to other project requirements, you will be successful. You will graduate from college. This message of success through conscientious effort is repeated over and over.

Finally, a word about the "structure" in a structured freshman year experience. Some readers may react to the description of these projects by thinking that these projects sound way too restrictive and too much like high school. After all, college is supposed to be an adult experience, freer and less restrictive than what has gone before. To these readers, we would ask you to consider how initial college experiences are organized in some of the most elite and famous colleges in the nation. In many elite (and relatively small) schools it is expected that freshmen students will take courses from a restricted set of related liberal arts offerings. These institutions are deservedly proud of their freshman-year curricula. They also provide a profusion of social and learning activities for groups with shared interests. Since almost all students live on campus there is little difficulty in developing a group identity or forming friendships. In short, a structured freshman year is what these schools try to provide to everyone.

More important than emulating the elite, however, the structured freshman year approach provides and repeatedly reinforces the most important skill that students will need to succeed--it teaches them how to study through a carefully selected group of courses and supplemental academic assistance. At-risk students benefit disproportionately, because they are more likely not to have been exposed previously to such critical skills as how to identify the key concepts in a lecture or study for an exam. They are often adrift in large lectures accompanied by vast reading assignment. They need help to learn how separate what is truly important from what is just interesting in the vast amount of information to which they are fleetingly exposed.

III. Implementing a Structured Freshman Year

Creating a structured freshman year project requires the cooperation of institutional officials, but it does not require a level of financial support greater than that

available to most SSS projects. Some projects believe that they cannot implement this type of project because they do not have the resources or because the project is viewed as "marginal" (by faculty) to the institution in which it is located. In our study, we found that projects that have implemented structured freshman year do not have greater resources than other projects. They have, however, gained sufficient authority to approach students very early in their college careers and influence their initial course choices. That is the main way in which they differ from projects as a whole.

This early, directive contact is critical to carrying out a freshman year project. If the project cannot play a role in initial course enrollment decisions it will have an almost impossible task in constructing a structured-freshman-year project. We have already noted that project participation is sometimes a condition of admission, but that is not always the case. Participation may well be voluntary but "highly advised" by institutional or project officials at the time of admission or very shortly thereafter (e.g., at pre-freshman orientation or registration).

Enabling the project to have early access is the one institutional contribution that is vital to a structured freshman year. Without it, any project is reduced to advertising to attract and retain participants. Advertising and subsequent recruitment take major resources (staff time) and can rarely accomplish the degree of student attachment to a project that can be achieved through the connection with admissions. A project with that level of access to students does not have to worry about its status on campus; it is seen by the students as an integral part of their early college experience, not an add-on or supplement. Participants consider themselves as the fortunate few who have been selected.

Few institutions will be willing to link admissions and project participation unless the project is designed in a way that makes the link rational. The project has to provide the services that do, in fact, improve academic performance in initial courses. We have already outlined those academic services. It is not enough to "offer" the standard "laundry list" of support services and expect students to take the initiative. Ongoing academic support must be part of the student's weekly instructional and study routine and the content must be reflected in regular coursework. Further, that assistance must be provided by people who are well versed in the academic subject matter of the courses. Peer tutoring that helps the tutor learn the subject matter as well as the tutoree is not appropriate in a structured-freshman-year program.

Structured freshman year projects do not cost more money than other projects, but they use resources differently. Quite simply, they spend a greater percentage of their budget on "instructional" services than does the typical project. The projects we studied relied heavily on less-than-full-time professionals (i.e, persons with at least bachelors' degrees and subject matter expertise) to provide developmental course instruction, SI, study groups, and labs. These staff may be employed elsewhere in the institution as well, for example as developmental instructors. They may also be graduate students with subject matter expertise who are seeking part-time employment.

Other projects (such as some of those outlined below) employ upper division students who have done well in a course to lead SI or study groups, but those students receive substantial amounts of pre-service training. The tutors or SI leader accompany the students to the classes and then lead the groups. Quite frankly, it is almost impossible to operate a structured freshman year project with a staff composed entirely of persons with backgrounds in counseling and guidance unless they are willing to learn course content and lead academic support groups.

SSS projects rarely (if ever) provide the structured freshman year program to all participants at once. Typically, half or fewer SSS participants are receiving the structured freshman year services in any given year. The rest are either receiving a subset of freshman year services (perhaps only special admits are in the intensive program) or a different set of services because they are not freshmen. The limits on the number of participants that receive the intensive program also help projects offer the program on a limited budget.

IV. Real Life Examples of Structured Freshman Year

We turn now to a description of five structured-freshman-year projects. They are located at public and private institutions of different size and in different parts of the country. They reflect three different approaches to structuring a freshman year experience although they share common elements. The institutions whose projects we will describe include The University of New Orleans, Marquette University, and Lewis-Clark State College, University of Maryland and University of South Carolina.

The University of New Orleans (UNO)
New Orleans, LA

The SSS project at UNO serves about 175 students a year and about 40 of those students are new freshman students enrolled in the intensive SSS Freshman Experience Program (FEP). SSS participation is linked directly to the academic program. The aim of the project is to provide the maximum amount of service during freshman year through consistent instructor contact and student interaction.

With the assistance of university offices (admissions primarily, but also retention, financial aid, TRIO programs, etc.) SSS identifies 40 first-time students who qualify for SSS, who do not meet the established admissions criteria (with respect to SAT/ACT, high school GPA, etc.) and who appear to demonstrate the capacity and motivation to succeed. Those students are invited to enroll in FEP before the start of their first semester. The students attend a summer recruitment meeting that explains the FEP curriculum and the services that they will receive. Those who are accepted attend a special orientation that includes choosing their first-semester courses.

The FEP students' freshman year program includes the following:

- block rostered enrollment in special sections of developmental math. Sections include two special weekly small-group tutoring sessions as well as the regular hours of instruction. One session is led by the instructor and a peer tutor; the other section is led by the peer tutor alone.

- block rostered special sections of developmental English with an SSS tutor. These sections meet for more hours a week than other comparable sections for nonparticipants.

- block rostered special sections of two designated elective courses-- Introductory to Sociology or Human Sexual Behavior. First-semester students take one of these two courses. Tutoring and SI are available for these courses.

- A one-credit study skills development course called Academic Orientation, the content of which is linked to the "block rostered" elective course in which the student is enrolled. The skills learned in this class are timed to coincide with, and reinforce, the work required in the elective courses.

The elective courses have been chosen because they are among the largest courses at the institution and are often intimidating to new freshmen. They are also consistently well taught and provide a good academic experience for the students--challenging yet accessible. The material is engaging, providing a strong incentive for consistent participation and for developing a commitment to academic inquiry. Students usually select one of these two courses and one additional course depending on their personal interests. In the second semester of freshman year, students can select two electives based on personal interest although they continue to take the special sections of developmental classes. They also take an academic orientation course focusing on career exploration and offering mentoring.

Project counseling is designed to monitor student progress and help students set and accomplish goals. Each participant attends three counseling sessions each semester. The first session is held during the first two weeks of the semester and focuses on the actions students will need to take to succeed in their courses. The second is a midterm review during which performance in each class is reviewed and decisions to drop courses may be made. The final session takes place 2-3 weeks before the end of the semester, when courses for the next semester are selected.

The UNO SSS project has solid evidence on the effects of the intensive program. For example, the spring 1996 special sections of developmental English had pass rate considerably higher than those of other sections (based on a standardized exam taken by all students). SSS sections of two different developmental courses showed rates of 88.8 percent and 81.8 percent compared with overall institutional rates of 72.8 percent and 61.3 percent, respectively. The FEP director, Ellen Levitov, attributes the success of the program to the more intensive instruction, the greater opportunity for students to make contacts with instructors, and the importance of peer reinforcement.

Marquette University
Milwaukee, WI

At Marquette, the SSS project reflects the university's active recruitment of disadvantaged students. Potential participants are identified to the project by the admissions office as well as other sources. The SSS Admissions Committee (project director and key staff) then reviews all applicants and selects those who have both the need and the potential to succeed. Only those students who are accepted into SSS are awarded EOP scholarships (by the institution), which is a powerful incentive to participate. The SSS admissions process takes place during the spring prior to freshman year. Early identification makes it possible to enroll those selected in the six-week pre-freshman SSS summer program (some non-freshman transfers may also participate).

The residential summer program puts a premium on academic readiness. It is a highly structured affair in which students select one of two 3-credit courses (Growth of Western Civilization or Principles of Sociology) each of which is accompanied by a support seminar. They are also enrolled in two or more SSS developmental courses (in writing, math or logic, or reading). Students are placed in courses based on ACT scores, an SSS writing sample, the Marquette Mathematics Profile and other tests administered during the admissions review. A summer GPA of 2.0 is expected for continuation. Students also meet with counselors to review course catalogues and select fall courses, so that SSS plays a central role in the initial courses students choose. A variety of group activities are designed to encourage peer support networks and positive relationships with SSS staff. There are 30 hours of activities a week (instructional and noninstructional combined).

During the school year, SSS provides block rostering and instructional support for key freshman courses. SSS seminars parallel popular university courses in math and science. The seminars are small groups where students can ask questions about coursework and develop peer support networks. EOP instructional specialists head the seminars and also meet individually with students who need additional assistance. In freshman English, all students must meet with a writing specialist at various times, but SSS students participate in additional peer writing groups with SSS writing specialists who also use interactive computer software to help students analyze and improve their writing. SSS block rosters some freshman year participants into special sections of history courses that are accompanied by twice-weekly SSS-led seminars that reinforce coursework and help develop study skills. SSS staff refer students who need more intensive help to institution-provided peer tutoring (upper division SSS participants are encouraged to become tutors).

The other important dimension of the SSS program is freshman advising. During the summer program, counselors help participants choose a manageable fall schedule, which is modified if needed based on summer performance. Students may be encouraged to take fewer credit courses or not to weight themselves down with, for example, two science courses and a foreign language course. Counselors provide

career and financial aid counseling as well, beginning with the summer program. Students may also receive personal or other non-academic counseling, if needed.

SSS also plays a major role in enforcing academic standards of participants. When students are accepted they learn that they must attend all advising, counseling and support sessions to continue as participants (and EOP grant recipients); they sign a contract to participate in SSS. Each semester, participants must meet with their counselors before they can register. Individual advising sessions are held at midterm, and students who are experiencing difficulties receive additional advising and academic support. When passing appears hopeless, students are advised to withdraw or audit the course and devote their time to remaining coursework. SSS has established a systematic early warning system with varying levels of intervention depending on the severity of academic problems. For students who do not meet performance standards, the SSS Retention Committee enforces various sanctions (warning, project probation, project dismissal).

Lewis-Clark State College
Lewiston, ID

The Lewis-Clark freshman year program uses a "learning community" model. Each year, 20-25 new SSS participants are permitted to enter the Academic Learning Community, a four-course core program. Most of the participants are provisionally-admitted students who need to improve academic skills. In the fall semester, members of the community are block rostered into four courses--English composition, public speaking, introduction to psychology and an introductory social science course. Accompanying the courses is a credited SSS course that provides advising, writing skill development, study skill application (linked to the content of the four courses), computer skill development, and other skills as needed. Its aim is to foster collaborative learning and it meets twice a week for an hour and quarter. In the spring semester, learning community participants may elect to take one course together (they usually take the second English core course). They may also take SSS developmental courses in math or an SSS career development course.

SSS also operates a learning lab which is open to all SSS participants, but is mandatory for Academic Learning Community participants. The lab is staffed by project professionals and upper division tutors or mentors and it maintains an attendance log. (Tutors/mentors are supported through work/study.) SSS participants use the lab for tutoring, study groups, and study time (away from family or other distractions).

Students in the learning community spend over 100 hours with an SSS project professional and an equal number in the labs during the first semester. If they continue into the second semester course they will have 45 additional professional hours plus additional lab time. And they may also be enrolled in the SSS math course (with required math labs). The result is a high level of SSS contact with participants and a

strong network of peers. (This discussion omits description of the advising component, which is available to all SSS participants.)

The learning community approach was developed over nine years. Faculty played an important role in its development, both individually and through an advisory board that meets twice a year. The program was supported by the Vice President for Student Affairs and the overall campus administration. The SSS staff likes the program for many reasons, particularly the ability to address academic needs in a group setting and monitor student progress on an ongoing basis. Cooperation of faculty with the SSS project has also been enhanced through the learning community program.

The learning community approach has evidence of its effectiveness in the past several years. Degree-seeking provisional students accepted into SSS show a one-semester retention rate of 84 percent, compared with 76 percent for all provisionally accepted students. SSS staff attribute this difference to the bonding experience the learning community provides. SSS staff are now implementing a program for students who seek help after the start of a semester that emulates some of the features of the structured program (a credit-bearing program of twice-weekly meetings on study skills development coupled with extensive use of the SSS lab).

University of Maryland
College Park, MD

The University of Maryland operates a structured freshman year program that blends state (Intensive Education Development Program) and federal (SSS) resources to provide a comprehensive program. The SSS/IED Program is designed to enhance the academic performance and personal growth of all participants.

The program begins with admissions. The admissions office refers students who may not meet automatic admissions criteria (i.e., those marginally admitted) and SSS eligible to the IED/SSS project for consideration. The students are given diagnostic math, English, reading, and study skills tests by IED personnel. They also write essays and submit recommendations. A team of IED personnel recommends students for participation in an SSS/IED Summer Transition, a six-week residential program (generally limited to marginal admits). During the summer, students are offered an integrated curriculum designed to enhance math, reading comprehension, writing, and study skills. They also enroll in a one-credit personal development course offered by the SSS Counseling Unit and a three-credit university core course for which individual and group tutoring is provided (the tutors attend the classes with the students and provide SI). The summer program also provides individual and group counseling on a wide range of skills and intrusive advising to plan freshman coursetaking. Students who successfully complete the summer program are admitted to the university though the SSS/IED program, which provides advising and registers students for courses.

During freshman year, summer program participants are enrolled in an intensive

program called Developmental Year. The summer curriculum of skills enhancement is continued and augmented with academic tutoring and counseling in a three credit course. After consultation with SSS counselors, students also enroll in up to 13 credits of regular freshman-level courses. A bi-weekly Early Warning Monitoring System combined with mid-term faculty assessments allows counselors to track student performance in courses and provide additional support or discipline needed to improve performance. Students considered at risk meet with a staff team to discuss problems and work on solutions. There are four required student body meetings as well. Other SSS participants (those who are regularly admitted) receive a more limited amount of service (counseling and tutoring primarily) which usually does not include the summer program. After freshman year, service intensity is usually reduced, although SSS counselors continue to be advisers and register the students for classes.

Evidence of effectiveness of the IED/SSS Program has been collected for many years. In general, Developmental Year participants who complete the freshman year show GPAs and introductory course performance considerably higher than other marginally admitted freshmen. Their GPAs are only slightly lower--by .3 or .4 of a percent on average--than those of regularly-admitted freshman despite having entered with high school GPAs a full percentage point lower than those of other students.

University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC

The Opportunity Scholars Program (the SSS project at the university) offers a comprehensive freshman-year program for approximately 50 students a year with lower entering SATs than other freshmen (there are about 200 participants overall). The program offers a small-college atmosphere with "block rostering" of participants into separate sections of regular freshman courses that meet general education requirements taught by SSS instructors. It also provides one-on-one peer and professional tutoring for those courses, intrusive advising, an orientation course, and a wide range of workshops, mentoring, and cultural activities. Upper division SSS participants provide a portion of the tutoring and other support services.

While participation in OSP is not a condition of admission, the OSP staff is able to identify and enroll participants before the start of freshman year. Early in the summer before freshman year begins, the project receives a list of new first-generation freshman students with full Pell grants from the financial aid office. It sends these students an application for the OSP program and receives the applications back (it also follows up with those who do not return the applications). After reviewing SAT scores and other background data, the project issues invitations and enrolls new participants. This early intervention means that the project is able to shape the freshman experience of OSP participants.

Multi-year data for project outcomes show a 62 percent six-year graduation rate for OSP participants in comparison with a 66 percent overall university rate (despite entering SAT scores substantially lower than those of other entrants).

V. Summary

This monograph began by describing the rationale for freshman-year intervention. Based on Tinto's theory of college retention, it argued that early freshman experience is an important determinant of college continuation and the most appropriate point of intervention. Further, interventions should emphasize positive early academic experiences, the main objective of a structured freshman year approach. The paper then presented common components of structured-freshman-year programs including project staff participation in admissions decisions, pre-freshman preparation (such as summer bridge programs), a project role in students' initial course selections, intrusive advising, academic support through the project (developmental instruction, SI, study groups, tutoring, labs), group services (both academic and advising) and a strong message of success through effort. The paper concluded with five examples of structured-freshman-year projects currently operated by SSS grantees. The first project offers block-rostered developmental and regular freshman courses accompanied by an SSS study skills course; the second project offers a summer bridge followed by block rostered courses, intrusive advising and special grants contingent on continued participation and adequate performance; the third project uses a learning community approach in which students take the same four courses and receive additional academic support through the SSS lab; the fourth project combines a summer bridge with freshman year developmental offerings as well as intensive tutoring and counseling; and the fifth creates an integrated curricular, advising, and tutoring program for a small group of disadvantaged students. These examples help to show the diversity of structured-freshman-year approaches. ◆

Abrams, H.G. and Jernigan, L.P., "Academic Support Services and the Success of High-Risk College Students," American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 21 No.2, 1984, pp. 261-274

Burris, B.M., Academic Enrichment Project for Disadvantaged Students, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Washington, D.C., 1990

Chaney, B., Muraskin, L., Cahalan, M., and Rak, R., Third-Year Longitudinal Study Results and Program Implementation Update, National Study of Student Support Services, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 1997

Doyle, T.J., Report on the Ferris State University Collegiate Skills Program: Three Year Findings of the Collegiate Skills Program's Impact on Academically High Risk General Studies Freshmen, Ferris State University, Big Rapids, MI, 1989

Guthrie, L.F., Minority Retention and Achievement: Evaluation of the California State University Summer Bridge and Intensive Learning Experience Programs, State of California, Sacramento, CA 1988

Horn, L.J. and Premo, M.D., Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Institutions: 1992-93; Statistical Analysis Report, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 1997

McCaig, K.A., "Collaborative Enhancement Strategies for Academically At-Risk First-Year Students, College Student Affairs Journal, Vol. 13 No. 1, 1993, pp. 58-64

Muraskin, L., "Best Practices" in Student Support Services, Followup Study of Student Support Services Programs, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 1997 (forthcoming)

Read, S., TRIO Special Services Program Evaluation(s) Annual Final Reports for 1980-81 through 1983-84, University of Minnesota, 1981, 1982, 1983, and 1985

Tinto, V., Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1993

Tinto, V., "Reconstructing the First Year of College." Planning for Higher Education (published?), handout at NCEOA Retention Seminar, Tempe, AZ, 1997

Tinto, V., Love, A.G., and Russo, P., "Building Community," Discourse, Fall, 1993 Walters, J., and Marcus, L.R. Maximizing Retention Rates in Collegiate Programs for Disadvantaged Students, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, 1985

Lana Muraskin is Vice President of SMB Economic Research, Principal Investigator of the National Study of Student Support Services and a Senior Scholar for The Center for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Lana is currently conducting a follow-up study of "best practices" in Student Support Services projects. The aim of the current study is to provide practical information for project improvement. Lana has conducted and managed studies and evaluations of education programs and policies since the early 1970s.

1025 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005

202/347-7430